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Editorials | Article published Friday, November 14, 2003

Battle for the beachfront

The battle for Ohio's beaches continues in the General Assembly with introduction of a new version of a bill that would allow owners of beach-front property to put the Lake Erie shore off limits to its true owners - the general public.

The latest legislation is no better than the first. It still amounts to an audacious land grab to benefit a few politically connected owners of some of the state's most desirable home sites along the lake.

State Rep. Tim Grendell, a Chesterland Republican and author of this Robin Hood-in-reverse measure, continues to spread the falsehood that his bill would give back to shoreline property owners land that the state "took from them without compensation."

He's got it exactly backwards.

Under federal and state laws whose foundation extends to antiquity, those who own beachfront land don't own the beach or the lake in front of their property. The public does.

As the new bill was unveiled, four former directors of the state Department of Natural Resources - Republicans and Democrats alike - correctly noted that the measure would "put our coastal resources at risk by giving those few Ohioans who own land directly on the lakeshore the ability to extend their holdings into the lake itself."

Such action, the former DNR directors pointed out, would be a direct assault on "the heritage of all Ohioans."

What Mr. Grendell's elitist crusade boils down to is allowing well-to-do property owners the right to keep the public off the beach and out of the water in front of their homes or cottages.

It would erase the ages-old doctrine of "public trust," which holds that the public at large owns and retains access to natural waterways for navigation, fishing, and recreation.

This is a doctrine that has served the interests of all Ohioans equitably for some 200 years. We see no useful purpose in abrogating the rights of the many for the selfish pleasures of a few.

Opinion

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